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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 6080
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4417
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2061
RUEHN/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 4398
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3493
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8516
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5961
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0663
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2792
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/27/2018

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL PTER CE

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: DEFENSE JOURNALIST ABDUCTED, BEATEN AND RELEASED

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires James R. Moore, for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Keith Noyahr, a prominent journalist and defense analyst, was abducted and severely beaten by unidentified men on the night of May 22. The next day, hundreds of journalists protested the attack and demanded a full investigation. Some of the victim's journalist colleagues speculate that the attack was related to Noyahr's recent article criticizing Army Commander Lt. Gen. Fonseka or because of his reporting on the GSL's conduct of the war. The government has assigned three special police teams to investigate the abduction and assault. State TV reported that both the military spokesman and Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa have vehemently denied involvement by the security forces in the incident. End summary.

¶2. (U) Keith Noyahr, deputy editor and defense analyst at the English-language weekly "The Nation," was abducted outside his home in a suburb of Colombo by unidentified men late on the evening of May 22. After six to seven hours, his abductors released him near his home, severely beaten, but conscious. Noyahr was subsequently admitted to hospital for treatment. Media reported on May 24 that Noyahr was still in shock and told his colleagues that he was not yet able to make a statement on his abduction.

¶3. (SBU) On May 23 in Colombo, hundreds of Sri Lankan journalists protested the attack on Noyahr and demanded an inquiry into his abduction and assault. The protesters noted that the attack occurred within hours of Sri Lanka losing a vote to retain its seat on the UN Human Rights Council, speculating that threats to the media freedom were among the reasons for Sri Lanka's defeat in the vote. Some placards blamed the government for the attack on Noyahr. General Secretary of the Sri Lanka Working Journalists' Association Poddala Jayantha said, "We believe that the reason for this attack is Noyahr's independent writing and analysis of the country's civil war." Free Media Movement Secretary Sunanda Deshapriya urged the government to hold an impartial inquiry to find and prosecute the perpetrators.

¶4. (C) Police spokesman N.K. Ilangakoon said on May 23 that three special police teams have been assigned to investigate the attack. He added that the President had personally

instructed Police Chief Victor Perera to take prompt action. Many of Noyahr's journalistic colleagues have told us they believe his abduction and assault were linked to a recent article he wrote that was highly critical of Army Commander Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka. Ilangakoon invited anyone who believes the abduction was linked to Noyahr's recent article to provide a statement to the police. State TV and other media sources reported that both the military spokesman and Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa have vehemently denied any involvement by the security forces in the incident.

¶ 5. (C) COMMENT: The assault on Noyahr is part of a disturbing trend in the violent intimidation of journalists. Some journalists have told Emboffs that they do not expect the government to conduct a serious investigation. After the protests by the Free Media Movement, Deshapriya and two other journalists reported that the Defense Secretary had summoned them; they subsequently requested a meeting with Charge and the European Union's Head of Mission in Colombo, which will take place May 28. Post is not in a position to determine whether the attack on Noyahr was directed, approved, or carried out by the government. However, military intelligence "special units," violent hoodlums belonging to ministerial security details, members of paramilitary groups or hired criminal thugs are among the possible authors of this brutal act. We will strongly urge the GSL to conduct an impartial and thorough investigation, bring the perpetrators to justice, and take steps to prevent such attacks in the future.

MOORE